

A
GOOD CONSCIENCE
A
SAFE GUIDE:
OR THE
Liberty of Conscience
VINDICATED.

Declaring the Indispensible necessity lying upon
every man to preserve the Liberty of his
Conscience in matters of Religion :

W H E R E I N

The unlawfulness of imposing, and submitting to, In-
different things, as necessary in the worship of God,
is declared.

And the Supremacy of God over the Consciences of men asserted;
Shewing that God is the only proper Lord over the Conscience, and
his Law, the Bond thereof; and that no man may invade, or in-
trench thereupon, under any pretence whatsoever.

As also in what cases the Lawes of men do lose their Authority, and
not bind Conscience.

Preached at Aldermary in London, about the Month of February, 1661.
By **T O B I A S C O N Y E R S.**

*Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth, Rom. 14: 22.
Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou
judgest another, thou condemnest thy self; for thou that judgest, doest the same things.
Rom. 2. 1.*

A double minded man is unstable in all his wayes, James 1. 8.

Printed Anno 1663.

GOOD CONSCIENCE

SAFE GUIDE

TO THE

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To the Reader.

READER,

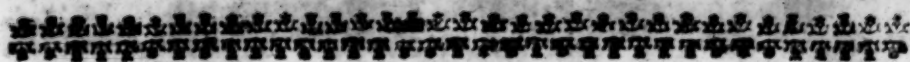


ONE of the Copies of this small piece coming to my hand, (amongst other friends, for whose more private use it seems to have been transcribed out of the Writers notes) I perused it over, and having so done, I could not but judge it an acceptable work, to make it more publick. If thou art a man of Conscience this discourse will please thee: but if thou hast no conscience, I mean no informed, enlightened, awakened conscience, (for every man hath a conscience, dark or light, good or evil,) then this Discourse will not savour with thee; for so it is, that men of no conscience, care not to have conscience preach't; especially such of them, who have lost their consciences, that have by sinning against light, by disobeying the motions and dictates of conscience, silenced conscience [that great Oracle of God in man] that it is become as if Seared with an hot Iron, as the Author observes Apostates do, who desert the truth they formerly profest, and return with the Sow to her wallowing in the mire. It's the great design of the Devil to preserve the hellish peace of a wicked man, to keep that conscience silent, whose mouth the sinner hath stopt: the Devil cares not whether ever conscience speaks again, or no, till the soul comes to lye under everlasting burnings. So long as conscience is

To the Reader.

silent, and thereby the sinners peace preserved, the Devil is sure of his Subject : but if once this peace be broken, before the sinner bids farewell to this world, then the continuance of the Dominion and Rule of the Devil, in the soul, is questionable. In this following Discourse, the Author hath approved himself a workman that need not to be ashamed : he hath spoken much in a little, preach't many Sermons, in one. If thou wouldst know what a good conscience is : the extent of it : its utility and excellency : the bonds that tie it : If thou wouldst know who is the Supreme Lord of conscience, whether this, or the other man, or any man on earth : If thou wouldst know how farre conscience is bound by the Lawes of men, and how farre free : All these great Queries are resolved in the following Discourse, with much dexterity and perspicuity. The good Lord grant that this Sermon may neither witnesse against him that preach't it, those that heard it, or any that may read it. I make no doubt but thou wilt find it very faithfully and carefully done, without the least wrong or damage to the Author : Happily there may be here and there some small enlargements wanting, with which it was delivered in the Pulpit, yet such as are like to be no wayes prejudicial to the Authors sense, or thy profit. I shall detain thee no longer in the Porch, but commend the ensuing discourse to thy reading, and Gods blessing.


Vale.



A

Good Conscience, a safe Guide ;
OR THE
Liberty of Conscience Vindicated.

Heb. 13. 18. *For we trust we have a good Conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.*

T was the saying of Solon the great Law-giver, *That in his time there were many good Laws enacted, yet there wanted one extremely necessary, and that was to see them put into execution.* The like may be said of the many good Books, and Sermons that are made amongst us, there is still one Book wanting, and that is *the Book of Conscience*, which we ought to look into, to help us to put all these into practice and execution. It was the complaint of *Austin* many hundred years agoe, and still continues matter of complaint amongst us in these dayes, *Many seek after Science, but few seek after (that is, exercise) Conscience*; and indeed many have a Conscience for their condemnation, that have not a Conscience for their vertue and salvation; for Conscience is the *house* of the Soul that lies extremely ruined, and laid to wast in these dayes wherein we live. So that we have too much reason to say, *Many have Science, few have Conscience*: Many know much, but few look to put into execution that which they know. But I shall not make any large preamble to these words; neither detain you long by seeking out any strict Connexion: The words immediately foregoing are the Apostles Exhortation to stir them up to *obey them that had the rule over them, and submit unto them, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account.* And here in this verse he first bespeaks a duty of them, and that is, their prayers: Secondly, he enforceth this duty, and urgeth it; *for we trust that we have a good Conscience*: Thirdly, this Reason is exemplified, and enlarged in the extent of it; *in all things willing to live honestly.* I shall

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I shall not now speak to the Duty enjoyned upon them, namely, the peoples prayers, for the Apostles success: but shall come unto the reason from which he urgeth this Duty, and shall consider it Doctrinally :

Doct. *That it is our Duty to keep a good Conscience in all things.*

And here I shall speak to these four things.

1. That God hath planted in every man a Conscience.
2. What a good Conscience is.
3. I shall speak to the extent of it, That we are to keep a good Conscience in all things.
4. The benefits, or usefulness of a good Conscience.

First, That there is in every man a Conscience. And if you will say, *What is Conscience?* I answer, The word in the Original signifies [*to know together*] and so it may either relate unto God, who knoweth, together with us, the things that we do: or else, it may relate to us, and signifieth that there is something within us, which in Gods stead, knoweth together with us, the things which we do, whether they be good or evil.

Now this Conscience is in every man, It is said of the Heathen and Infidels (*Rom. 2. 15.*) *Their Conscience also bearing them witness, &c.* There is none in humane nature so barbarous, where the sparks of Conscience are not. There was a Conscience in the *Scribes and Pharisees, Joh. 8. 9.* As it is impossible for fire to be without heat, though it may be covered with ashes; so it is impossible to separate Conscience from a man; it is a piece of the humane nature, and lives and dies with us: though it may be choaked, or seared and stupified, yet still there is a Conscience of good and evil, that necessarily cleaves to the humane nature. No length of time can wear this Conscience out: No force is able to suppress it: No greatness or power can stifle it: No musick can charm it: No, nor death it self is able to part Conscience from a sinner; but it shall awake with him in that great day: for Conscience is that *worme that never dyeth; that fire that never goeth out, but endureth so long as man endureth.*

No length of time can wear this Conscience out: *Joseph's Brethren*, when in *Pharaoh's Court*, had a Conscience of that evil which they had done to their Brother *twenty* years before.

No violence or force is able to suppress it: but it will shew it self,

self, to the terrour of wicked men, at one time or other : this made *Judas* to bring again the money which he had taken as the unjust price of his Masters Bloud, and to throw it down at the feet of the *Scribes and Pharisees*.

No greatness or power is able to stifle it : it made *Pharaoh* come down from his Throne, and cry out, *I have sinned ; I and my people have done wickedly*.

All the pleasures and delights of this world, are not able to charme it ; but it will speak at one time or other. That pensiveness of Melancholy that came upon *Saul*, was nothing but the *evill spirit* of his own Conscience : and though he call'd for the harp, and instruments of Musick, and sought to allay this *evill Spirit*, which his own sins had raised up against him ; he was not able to do it. That's the first thing, There is in every man a Conscience.

Secondly, What is good Conscience ? 2. I answer, 1. Negatively, An Erroneous Conscience is not a good Conscience : though it may be accompanied with never so fair pretences of zeal, and piety, and godliness ; yet if it do misguide us from the way of Gods word, and make us swerve from the Rules of righteousness and justice ; it is no good Conscience.

A Question therefore necessarily ariseth, *whether we are bound to follow an Erroneous Conscience ?* To which I Answer, 1. VVe cannot without sin either obey, or disobey an erroneous Conscience ; if Conscience erre in respect of Gods Command, and enioyne us to do that which is contrary to Gods Law, to be sure here we sin : for we must alwayes know, that the Law of God is Superior, and above a mans Conscience ; for the Conscience of a man is to be informed by Gods Law, and it gathers light and strength from it. So that if Conscience binds to do any thing contrary to Gods Law, we sin in obeying it ; because the Law of God is above Conscience, and that remaineth stedfast, and immoveable, whether our Conscience be rightly informed concerning it, or no.

2. Neither can we disobey an erroneous Conscience without sin ; this is the miserable *Dilemma* that erring Consciences do bind the persons in whom they are unto : As for instance, If an ignorant man think himself bound in Conscience to pray unto Saints departed, which either God hath forbid, or not given us sufficient warrant to doe ; in this case if he do pray unto the Saints departed, he sins, because he goes contrary to Gods VVill ; or
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hath not a sufficient warrant for what he doth : Or, if he doth not pray unto them, he sins, because he goes contrary to his own Conscience.

3. (and Lastly) If Conscience impose a thing as necessary, which is in it self indifferent, it becomes necessary to that man : For instance, if a man think in his Conscience that he ought to observe dayes and times of fasting ; or that he ought to pray so many times a day ; in this case they are necessary to this man ; because his Conscience makes them to be so. So that thus we see how far we may, or may not, follow an erring Conscience.

But more positively, a good Conscience is 1. An enlightned. 2. A peaceable. 3. A faithfull Conscience.

First, It is an enlightned Conscience ; a Conscience rightly informed ; that doth direct and judge aright from Gods word ; from the remaining Law ; or from the Law of eternal Truth and Righteousness. Such a Conscience had *David*, Psal. 119. 105. There is a twofold knowledge requisite in this case, 1. The knowledge of Gods Law ; unlesse the Conscience be informed, and enlightned by Gods Law, either revealed, or implanted, or gathered by observation, or by known rules of eternal righteousness, it could neither justifie, nor condemn ; neither acquit, nor accuse any man. 2. There must be the knowledge of our selves, that we may know how far we do obey the Law of God, and how farre not. The *Scribes* and *Pharisees* did well know out of Gods Law, that to shed innocent blood was forbidden, yet they put our Saviour to death, because they did not know themselves ; therefore he prayes, *Father forgive them, they know not what they do.*

Secondly, A good Conscience is a peaceable Conscience ; which neither doth, nor can accuse us of any wickedness ; but is alwayes ready to acquit and discharge us. Such a Conscience had *Obadiah*, who, it is said, *Feared the Lord from his youth* : Such a Conscience had *Paul*, Acts 24. 16. And such a Conscience had *Samuel*, when he pleaded his innocency before the Elders of *Israel*, 1 Sam. 12. 2, 3. *Job* also had this quiet Conscience, *Job* 31. 19, 20, 21. And such a Conscience had old *Simeon*, Luke 2. 29, 30. A good Conscience is a peaceable Conscience.

Object. But if the quietnesse of a mans Conscience be the goodness of it, many wicked men may plead high for a good Conscience, since they seem to live in all peace and quietness of mind, and Conscience ;
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and to passe over their time with great ease and content.

To this I answer, There is (questionless) a very great difference betwixt the peace of a good mans, and of a wicked mans, Conscience: the wicked have but the name, and shadow of peace; a peace falsely so called; the true peace they have not known, *There is no peace to the wicked, saith my God, Isa. 57. 21.*

Besides the Godly mans peace of Conscience, flowes from his Justification, *Rom. 8. 1.* whereas a wicked mans peace flowes from his riches, and honour, and outward contentments in the world.

Again, The peace of a wicked mans Conscience is momentary, and transitory; whereas the peace of a good man is more lasting and permanent: if affliction, sicknesse, disgrace, poverty, or death cometh, this bereaves a wicked man of all his peace, and then Conscience, like a roaring Lyon, breaks forth against him.

Thirdly, A good Conscience is a faithfull Conscience; and this hath two properties; 1. It is very watchful, and alwayes ready to excite and provoke us to the doing of good, or eschewing of evill; it will not let slip any occasion, or opportunity whereby we may better our selves or others. It was a faithfull Conscience that made *David* say, *I will never forget thy precepts, Psal. 119.* Again 2. a faithfull Conscience is impartially rigid and severe; it will not comply with us, in any thing contrary to its judgment, but will alwayes speak what it thinks: Men oft times do wave their own sense, and speak to us in such terms as they think will most comply with us; but a faithfull Conscience is alwaies ready to speak the truth unto us in every case; it is very exact and severe. Thus we have shewed what a good Conscience is.

In the third place, The extent of a good Conscience, it must be in all things; 1. in acts of piety to God; 2. in acts of righteousness, and charity to men.

First, A good Conscience must be kept, in acts of piety to God; Conscience is most scrupulous and tender about the things of God; which made an Ancient Father say, *The little Scruples of Religion, are the great grievances of Conscience:* and he that would keep a good Conscience, must be most observant in these things; for the more nearly things relate unto God, the more strict Conscience is: And here these two rules must be observed, 1. We

must do nothing in Religion with *doubting* Consciences. 2. Much lesse *contrary* to Conscience.

First, We must do nothing in Religion with *doubting*, or scrupulous Consciences ; that is, whilst Conscience is in suspense whether the things be lawful, or not ; what we do in this case is sinfull, because we converse with God *doubtingly* ; and *what is not off faith, is sin* : according to that of the Apostle, *Rom. 14. 23.* Therefore we must labour to satisfie, and truly to inform our Consciences, that we may have faith and confidence in God, and the things of God.

Secondly, Much lesse ought we to do any thing contrary to Conscience, in the things of God : Conscience must not be forced ; we ought not to bow the knee of Conscience, to any man ; not for fear, nor favour, nor gaine, nor losse, nor for any hope of advantage in this world, we must not break our Consciences, nor force them to those things which they are not free unto ; that man is miserable, that alloweth himself in those things wherein his Conscience is offended : Conscience is Gods Deputy in the soul, O whilst Conscience looks on, God himself looks on ; and it is Gods Régister, and records what we do ; and if we do any thing contrary to Conscience, we do exceedingly sin against God : Remember the case of *Francis Spira*, when his wife and children came about him, the thoughts of that Estate which he had reserved for them upon such ill terms , how did his Conscience terrifie him ? So dangerous a thing it is to do any thing contrary to Conscience : therefore let us not be brought to go further in Religion then our Consciences will permit us ; for we owe more to Conscience, then to any mortall man ; and the Lawes of Conscience are more binding upon us, then all the Lawes and Ordinances in the world ; and the time cometh when we shall know, that the disobeying of our own Conscience is more injurious to us, then the disobeying of all other Authorities whatsoever ; for by offending against Conscience, we offend God, whose face and image Conscience beareth.

Secondly, We must keep a good Conscience in acts of mercy, and righteousness unto men : for Conscience is Gods Deputy, and our Over-seer ; not to overlook us in the things that relate immediately towards God onely ; but likewise in those duties which refer one unto another. The Phrase in the Text is, *Willing*

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to live honestly : Many men are forward in acts of Religion, which are backward in acts of charity and righteousness to men : this is a strange spirit, by which many are acted. What are we in this case, but like the *Scribes and Pharisees*, those *painted Sepulchers*, that were indeed outwardly glorious, in respect of the form of Religion, but inwardly full of all rottenness and impurity ? but in vain do they pretend to glorifie God in acts of devotion, who are remiss, and negligent in the duties of charity and righteousness towards men ; for Conscience is not more exact to see us perform religious acts, then it is to see us discharge our duty one towards another : the former being as means, in order to the latter : therefore as we are to keep a good Conscience in acts of piety towards God ; so are we likewise in acts of justice, and charity, and righteousness towards men.

Fourthly, The next particular is, The usefulness of a good Conscience : and here we shall consider Conscience in a fourfold respect : 1. As a Witness. 2. As a Judge. 3. As a Counsellour. 4. As a Comforter.

First, Conscience is a witness ; God hath put it into this Office ; it is his Register here on earth : and this Register Book shall be opened in the great day of account. There are two great properties of this Witness of Conscience ; 1. It is Supreme, the highest, and most uncontrollable Witness in the world. The Heathen could say, that, *Conscience was a thousand Witnesses, either for, or against a man*. Though all the world should condemn us, yet if Conscience witness for us, it were not much material : and so on the contrary, 1 John 3. 20. *If our heart condemn us, God is greater then our heart, and knoweth all things*. As Judges here proceed according as things are alledged, and proved : so God, the great Judge of all the world, will proceed with us, as things are alledged and proved, by our own Consciences. 2. The Witness of Conscience is sincere and impartial : Conscience never gives a false testimony. Conscience doth sincerely witness, what we have done in child-hood ; in youth ; and in riper yeares ; what we have done openly, and secretly ; and those things that seem to be forgotten ; which made one to say, *Conscience hath a good memory*. The chief Butler forgot the promise that he had made to Joseph, but Conscience told him of it, Gen. 41. 9.

And this is a singular benefit of Conscience, it is the most Supream and impartial Witnesse.

Secondly, Conscience is a Judge ; it judgeth of things done, or to be done, whether they be good, or evill : As we try Gold by the Ballance, so Conscience doth try, and judge our actions, by Gods word, and the rules of eternall justice and righteousness ; and therefore Conscience is as the *Oracle of God* ; it is the great Judge, and Determiner of our actions, whether good or evill. And as Conscience is a Judge, so it is the most impartial Judge ; it respecteth no persons ; it values not the greatnesse of any mans estate ; it is not charmed with eloquence, neither can it be bribed with Gold or Silver ; it doth not fear the *Crown*, the *Scepter*, or the *Miter*. When *Belsazzar* sat amongst his Captains of warre, he saw a *Hand* that seemed to write, and though he knew not what the *Hand* writ, yet his Conscience presently gave him the Alarum, Dan. 5. 6. When *Paul* reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, before *Fælix* the Roman Deputy, the Text tells us, that *Fælix* trembled, Acts 24. 25. Perhaps *Fælix* thought to have terrified *Paul*, but *Fælix* his own Conscience terrified him more ; *Paul* reasoned of righteousness, before a corrupt Judge, that was addicted to bribery : and he reasoned of temperance, to *Fælix* that lived in adultery with another mans wife : and *Fælix* his Conscience gave him the Alarum ; and whilest he sought to terrifie *Paul*, and Judge him at his Barre ; his own Conscience judged himself much more. Conscience is a most impartial Judge.

Thirdly, Conscience is a wise and faithfull Councillour, to direct us in the doing of Good, or avoiding of Evill ; alwayes ready to tell us what we ought, or ought not to do ; and this with the greatest freedom, and faithfulness ; this is that which men call, *The Light within* ; the great *Light* which enlightneth every man, to distinguish good and evill. And Conscience will not only advise and counsel us, but if we will give it leave, it will give us Arguments to enforce us to follow its advice : It was Conscience that with-held *David* from killing *Saul*, his heart smote him. It was Conscience that with-held *Joseph* from consenting to the enticement of his Mistris, when secrecie, and opportunity, and time, and place, all conspired to further the temptation. *Ahab* the King of *Israel* refused the counsel of *Micaiah*,
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and hearkned to the four hundred false Prophets, who counselled him to his ruin. Conscience is that good *Micaiah*, the true Prophet, that alwaies counselleth us for our good; but flesh, and blood, and the world; the profits, and pleasures thereof, these are the false Prophets that counsell us for our ruine. Conscience is a faithful and wise Counsellour.

Fourthly, (and lastly) A good Conscience is a great Comforter; it is a *continual feast*, not for a day, or a week only, but a *continual feast*: a feast of *fat things*, whereunto good men only are invited; the wicked partake not of these dainties. What shall I speak of this benefit? A good Conscience is health, in sickness: riches, in poverty: honour, in disgrace: liberty, in prison: it is life, in death: it will remain with us, when all other earthly comforts will forsake us: It will make us look upon the *King of Terrors* with undaunted countenances; it made the Apostle sing that sweet Song at his Departure, 2 Tim. 4. 6, 7, 8. In the great day of Judgement, when all the world shall be of a light fire; *the Sea roaring*; and *mens hearts failing for feare*; *calling to the mountains and hills to fall upon them*, then a good Conscience will make a man lift up his face with boldness, before them that have oppressed him, and taken away his goods. A good Conscience is a great Comforter.

Before we come to make Application of this Doctrine, (since we are so bound to pursue the dictates of our Consciences) let us enquire, what are the bonds of Conscience: There are two sorts of bonds, that bind our Conscience; the first and great bond, is that which God layes upon us immediately, and in his own Authority; the second sort of bonds are those that men lay upon us by a borrowed and derived Authority from God: The first is an absolute bond: The second is a relative bond, as the School-men distinguish them: The first is that which God challengeth over us in his own right, as he is Lord of our Conscience: And the second is that which men challenge over us, not in their own right, but in the right of God, by a derivative, and delegated Authority from God.

First, Gods Law, that is the Supream bond of Conscience; whether it be the Law written in our hearts; or the Law written in Gods book: Unto us *Christians*, the Word of God written in his Book, is the great bond of our Consciences; and that which

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the Word of God binds, no man can loose ; and that which the Word of God looseth, no man can bind, and the reason is, because God is the principal and chief commander of Conscience, and his Law is the Bond of it. Gods VVill it is the standing rule, and measure of goodnes, *Rom. 7. 7. I had not known sin, but by the Law ; and where there is no Law, there can be no transgression.* The Word of God is that supream Powe , or chief Bond that binderh the Consciencés of men ; and no creature, how great soever , can dispence with this Bond or Obligation : It is a wicked usurpation in the Papal power, or any other Authority, when they take upon them to dispence with the breach of any of these Bonds; the breach of the Piecepts, either of the Old, or New Testament: To free the Consciencés of men where God hath bound them, is to exalt themselves above God ; it is more then the Angels in Heaven can doe : for we may say with the Prophet, *For ever, O Lord, is thy Word settled in its place ;* and we may as soon remove the Heavens out of their place, as remove these Bonds.

Secondly, Men may bind our Consciencés, not in their own right, but by Authority from God : the Laws of Magistrates are binding upon Conscience derivatively from God, because he hath bid us be subject unto them, *Rom. 13. 1. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers : For there is no power but of God ; and the powers that be, are ordained of God.* And *Vers. 5. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for Conscience sake.* Not only for wrath, that is, out of fear, because they carry the Sword of Justice: but for Conscience sake, because their power is of God. But still you must take it with this caution, Such Laws of men only are binding upon Conscience, which are virtually contained in the Laws of God : for the Lawes of men are only binding upon Conscience, as they are derivative from the Laws of God, and receive force from that spring. There are some cases wherein the Lawes of men do not bind the Conscience, which it is fit all of us should think of : Now the Lawes of men do not bind Conscience in such cases as these following.

First, When they command things unlawful, then they lose their power of binding the Conscience ; when they command things contrary to Gods VVord, then they are no longer in that force

force and authority which first impowered them: There is no man that is not devoid of Christianity, but must needs yield, that the Laws of men do no wayes bind Conscience in such a case. *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*, being commanded by the King to *Worship the Image which he had set up*; they disobeyed him, and were not careful to answer him in that matter, Dan. 3. 16. So also *Daniel* himself, Dan. 6. 10, 13. And when the Apostles were strictly charged to *preach no more in the Name of Jesus*, their Answer was, *Whether it be right, to obey God, or man, judge ye*: So that all commands of men lose their Authority of binding the Conscience, when they command things unlawful, or contrary to Gods VVord. [☞] And of their unlawfulness every mans Conscience is the proper Judge, and **NOT THEY THAT COMMAND THEM**: For, because *every man must answer for himself to God*, it is but reasonable that every man should judge for himself: for if no man shall bear the blame of my actions but myself, it is fit I should judge of them myself.

Secondly, The commands of Magistrates do not bind the Consciences of men, [☞] when they make things indifferent, absolutely necessary; in this case they are unlawful, and bind not the Conscience: for the Lawes of Christ are much superiour to the Lawes of men, whether *Civil*, or *Ecclesiastical*: Now indifferent things, are made so by the Lawes of Christ; for this is the Liberty which Christ hath given, and which we are exhorted to *stand fast in*; and in those things wherein the Lawes of Christ give *Liberty*, the Lawes of men cannot bring us into *Bondage*. Things indifferent, when they are made absolute and necessary, in many cases become unlawfull: As for instance, the wearing of a Gown, or a Surplice, or standing up at the *Creed*, or any other of those postures, or Apparels, &c. as things indifferent they may be used; but if they be enjoined upon us as things necessary unto the VVorship of God, as that it is not fit, or lawful to preach, or perform the VVorship of God without them, this is contrary to that Liberty which Christ hath given us, which is to use indifferent things, as things indifferent; as in such cases the precepts concerning them do not oblige us. But when they are commanded as things only indifferent, for some politick or prudential Reason, in such cases I think

think they may be used, only with these two great cautions, which are necessarily annexed to the use of all indifferent things : *Viz.*
 1. That we do it without offence to our selves. 2. Without scandal, and offence to others : Indifferent things are only to be used, when they are without these great prejudices, either the scrupling of a mans self ; or giving offence to others. For if I have a latitude, and for peace and quietness sake, could do a thing indifferent in it self ; I must likewise consult, whether I may do it without offence, or scandal to others ; as the Apostle gives it, *Rom. 14. 19, 20, &c.*

Quest. But here a Question ariseth, *whether things that are indifferent in themselves, being once commanded, do not become necessary ?*

Ans. I answer, That which is in its own nature *indifferent*, cannot by any precept ; or command whatsoever be changed in its nature, and become *necessary*. For that which *Christ* by his warrant and authority, hath made *Common*, or *Indifferent*, that cannot by any subsequent Law or Edict, be made *necessary* ; for if so, the Laws of men should be superiour to the Lawes of *Christ*, which is altogether irrational, and absurd ; and therefore that Liberty which *Jesus Christ* hath purchased for his people, the professors of true Religion, and declared in the Gospel, it cannot be changed, abridged, limited, or restrained by any subsequent Authority whatsoever.

But Secondly, Things indifferent, being commanded as indifferent, if they may be used without offence to our selves, or to others, in such a case, (as we said before) we ought to be obedient for Conscience sake. But since the general complexion and temper of men, at this day, in the *Christian* world, is of that nature, partly through weakness, and partly otherwise, the fewer commands that are given, the better : [☞] and he that hath good reason to scruple, and doubt, whether he shall be obeyed, or no ; it is the best point of his wisdom not to command at all : for it is much better that a Master, or Magistrate, should not command at all, then that having commanded, he should not be obeyed.

But I have proceeded in this Argument further then I thought to have done, and yet not further then the Vindication of the Truth

Truth doth require. I now conclude, *That the Consciences of men, they are Gods Territories, and he is the proper Lord over them; and no man may invade them, or intrench upon them, under any pretence whatsoever.* Liberty is a Christians Birth-right; it is that which all men challenge, *as men, and as Christians;* only we must not use this Liberty to the just scandal, or offence of any: for though *all things be lawful,* (that is, indifferent things) yet as circumstances may stand, *all things may not be expedient.*

Use. I come now to make some general Application of this Doctrine. In the first place, Since God hath implanted in every man a Conscience, it serves to gainsay that idle Opinion, *That Conscience is nothing else but a present fit of Melancholy, arising from the apprehension of evil, either felt, or feared; and that it is but a natural humour stirred up in the body, and made use of to disturb us.* It is true, that Conscience causeth a great deal of Melancholy, but it is not Melancholy it self. For Conscience is not any humour of the body; but it is a standing temper of mind; a natural power which cleaveth to the soul; namely, a Conscience of good and evil: even as Light cleaveth to the Sun, and Heat to the Fire; for this Conscience (which is nothing else but a knowledge of good and evil) is as necessarily fixed to the minds and souls of men, as either of those properties, to the elements we speak of. If Conscience were nothing else but a fit of Melancholy, as some Atheistical persons have informed themselves, it were then subject to the cure of Physitians, as other diseases are; but we all find by experience, that there is no herb that grows in our Gardens, for this disease; neither is there any natural medicine for this malady. What think you! was it only Melancholy that made Cain cry out, *My punishment is greater than I can bear?* and that made Judas bring the thirty pieces of silver, and throw them at the feet of those that hired him, and go away and hang himself? Certainly it was more than Melancholy that brought Francis Spira, and many others, to that desperation which the Records of our times, and former ages acquaint us with.

Use 2. It condemneth those persons exceedingly, that go about to suppress their Consciences; that labour to silence this great Oracle of God in themselves; that seek to blow out this Candle of the Lord, and to extinguish the Light within them. And this men may do, by running into company, and drowning themselves in sensuality, and pleasure, that so the voice of Conscience may not be heard in them; they do with the Conscience as *Saul* did with the *evil spirit* that haunted him, he called for a Minstrell, and sought to allay the fury of his spirit, by the sweet melodiousness of it; So men when haunted by this evil spirit, which pursues them from the Lord, they call for Instruments of musick, and seek to allay it, but they cannot do it. We silence our Conscience when we slight its advice, and go contrary to the dictates thereof. When Conscience speaketh, and men will not hear it, nor follow its advice, Conscience grows silent, and will speak no more, at least for some time; and hence it cometh to pass that in time mens Consciences become *Seared with a hot Iron*, as the Apostles expression is; without remorse, or feeling: This kind of Conscience is found in three sorts of persons: 1. In all dissolute persons, who like Common Strumpets, have prostituted their souls to every sin: In all obdurate and obdurate sinners, who like *Ahab* have *sold themselves to work wickednesse in the sight of God*. 2. In all Icoffers at Religion, who make a mock of it; that despise the profession of it; and deride those that run not into the same excess of riot with themselves. 3. In all Apostates from the Truth, who desert it, and *return with the Sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire*. Men of this Character, viz. of *Seared Consciences*, of all others, are in the most sad, and deplorable Estate, because they have lost the proper remedy of their souls conversion; for Conscience is the souls possibility of recovery, the proper means of mans restoration. Therefore to silence and stupifie Conscience, it is not only an act of great wickednesse, but likewise of folly and indiscretion: it is to silence the Oracle of God; to blow out the Candle of the Lord; to extinguish the light within us: and to slight the most proper means of our recovery, and restoration unto God.

Use 3. We shewed you that Conscience is a Witnesse, and faithfull Register of all our actions; as likewise a great Judge in the hearts of men: from thence we deduce, That it is no great matter for the opinion of the world, or what the world thinketh, or saith of us; but the great matter is, What is the judgement of our own Conscience: this is more valuable than the judgement of all the world: The testimonials of Conscience are supream, above all other testimonies: The judgement of the world is incompetent; a good Conscience will teach us to passe through the world quietly; through fear, and hope; through honour, and disgrace; through good report, and bad report; still there is something within us, that is for us, or against us: *With me* (saith the Apottle) *it is a small matter to be judged of you*: There is one that judgeth us within, and that is our own Conscience; and there is one that judgeth us without, and that is God.

Use 4. We shewed you, that an erroneous Conscience, is not a good Conscience; Let us therefore labour to have our Consciences enlightned, and truly informed, that they may faithfully discharge their duty. *Ignorance, is not the Mother of true Devotion*; it is not best walking in the dark; though some men do so affirm. There are some *alwayes teaching*, and others *alwayes learning*, and yet neither the one, nor the other *cometh to the knowledge of the Truth*. It is a comfortable thing to have our Consciences enlightned, that we may walk in the light, for *he that walketh in the light stumbleth not*, and feareth not: but the dark is an occasion of stumbling; and an occasion of fears, and jealousies: those whose Consciences are not enlightned, are full of scruples; full of offences; full of doubts; and full of fears: Let's labour therefore to have our Consciences enlightned, that we may discharge our duty in the places where God hath set us, without fears, or doubts, or jealousies. It is a great misery to be directed by blind Consciences: *If the blind, lead the blind, they must needs both fall into the Ditch*: Our Consciences are our Guides, and it is a sin to disobey them, whether they command us right, or wrong: if a man follow an erroneous Conscience, he sins against Gods Law: if he follow it not, he sins against his own Conscience, and condemneth himself in that which he alloweth.

Only let me give you this Caution, and now I speak to such as have weak and scrupulous Consciences; you must deal very tenderly with them: It was the direction that one gave, [*Those that are scrupulous, ought not to be handled rigidly*] when Conscience is scrupled, it must be gently dealt with: we must take heed of forcing it; or dealing bolsterously with it: Even as when a mote is in a mans eye, though it be but a small thing, yet because the eye is a tender part, we must not deal roughly with it, but very gently: the Conscience is a tender part, as the eye, and if there be any mote, or scruple in it, we must take it gently out. And as we are to deal gently and tenderly with our own Consciences when they are scrupulous, and not to force them; so must we do with other mens; for *whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, it is your duty to do even so to them*, it may be you know your liberty, that you may eat any thing, and weare any thing; but another that is weak thinketh not so; therefore saith the Apostle, (1 Cor. 8. 12.) *When ye sin against the brethren, and wound their weak Consciences, ye sin against Christ*. And why so? Because you make use of that liberty which *Christ* hath given you, to the prejudice of *Christ*; even to destroy him for whom *Christ* dyed: And Vers. 13. the Apostle shews how ready he was to follow his own advice, *Wherefore if meat make my Brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, least I make my Brother to offend*.

It is well queried by some, who is meant here by the *weak Brother*? Some think (and not without colour of truth) that it was not so much the *Christian Brother*, as the *Gentile Brother*; one that was not as yet fully drawn off from *Gentilisme*. The Question was concerning the lawfulness of eating meat sacrificed to Idols? The Apostle shews, that it was lawfull simply in it self, and gives a reason, Vers. 4. *We know that an Idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one*. Howbeit (saith he, vers. 7.) *there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with Conscience of the Idol unto this hour, eat it as a thing offered unto an Idol; and their Conscience being weak, is defiled*. That is, some who think an idol is something, and that meat ought to be offered to it, and that such meat is no longer *Common* meat, but hath something more than ordinary in it. And then, (as it is Vers. 10.) *If any*
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man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the Idols Temple, shall not the Conscience of him that is weak, be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to Idols? He that is weak, that is, he that believeth the Idol is something. So that the meaning is this, The Apostle thought it very lawfull to eat meat offered to Idols, because an Idol is nothing, and the meat neither better, nor worse, but the same for use: but least any person that had Conscience of the Idol, and thought that the meat offered to it, was more than common meat, least the Apostle should strengthen such a person in his opinion of the Idol, and of the worth of the meat offered to it, hereupon he resolves, never to eat meat, rather then strengthen such a person in his opinion of that kind. So that as we ought to deal very gently with our own scrupulous Consciences, not drawing them further or faster then they are naturally willing to go, the same clemency we use to our selves, the same moderation is expected towards others; that we make not use of our *Christian Liberty* to the offence or prejudice of our weak Brother, for whom Christ dyed.

Use 5. Lastly, If a good Conscience be of such great usefulness, as we have shewed, let us labour to keep a good Conscience in all things; let Pauls exercise, be ours, Acts 24. 16. *And herein I exercise my self, to have always a Conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man.* And for the better obtaining of this good Conscience there are three things to be done; Let a man begin with examination: and proceed to restitution: and end in repentance. We must first know our sin, and the evill that troubleth our Consciences; when we know it, we must then make satisfaction, according to the rules and proportions proposed: and lastly, we must endeavour to reform and amend, what thus we find amisse in our selves. First let a man examine himself, and find out the evil for which the Conscience is offended, if he would have a peaceable and a quiet Conscience: a disease cannot be cured before it be known, the wounds of Conscience cannot be healed till they be known; Now our Consciences are faithful Registers of our actions, if we look into them, we shall find those grievances that trouble our Consciences; it is then our duty to Audige our actions dayly at the barre of our Consciences. *Seneca* tells us of a Philo-

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Philosopher that was wont dayly to audire his actions, and to call himselfe to an account to find out the secret distempers of his soul, that there might nothing rest within him to disturb the quiet of his mind : From whence *Seneca* proceeds to advise us, that, *He is the best trades man, who dayly takes an account of his gaines, and losses* : But alas, some are so guilty, that they dare not ; others are so busie, that they cannot : and most are so negligent, that they do not look into this book of accounts, but referr all to the fatall issue of that great day ; when *the booke* indeed *shall be opened*, but little to such mens advantage. We need no *Angell* from Heaven, nor devination, to find out the *Achan* that troubleth our Conscience ; Let every man examine himself, and there he shall find the evill that troubleth him. 2. After examination, proceed to restitution ; Let the same mind be in us, as was in the Publican *Zacheus*, Luke 19. 8. *And Zacheus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor ; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold*. You may observe here a double satisfaction ; one that he offered to God : and the other that he offered to man : The satisfaction that he offered to God, *half his goods* he was willing to give unto the poor ; and he that gives to the poor, lends unto the Lord : the poor are Gods treasury, and what ever we cast in unto them, we do but put out to use ; and we shall (without doubt) one day receive our own with great benefit. And then *Zacheus* makes satisfaction to man, *If I have wronged any man, I restore it fourfold* : which occasioned the Father to say, *The sin cannot be remitted, unlesse that which was taken away be restored*. The King was bid, to break off his sins by repentance, and his iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor. 3. (and lastly) there must be a repentance, and cessation from the sin : a sorrow for the fact, and ceasing from it ; and when the cause of the trouble of Conscience is once removed, the effect must needs cease.

F I N I S.